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Agenda item 53
Comprehensive review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

Letter dated 19 January 2011 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

We have the honour to write to you about the third workshop on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations, co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of Australia and Uruguay to the United Nations in New York on 6 December 2010.

We consider that this was a very good opportunity to encourage an open, broad and constructive dialogue among Member States, peacekeepers from the field and the Secretariat about the strategic framework for comprehensive mission strategies on the protection of civilians, which is currently under development, and the additional steps that the Secretariat is taking to improve the implementation of mandates to protect civilians in the field.

A summary of the workshop discussions is attached (see annex). It describes briefly the main concerns, challenges and understandings raised by the various participants in this event.

We hope that this document will be helpful in discussions on these issues that could eventually take place in the General Assembly or its specialized body, the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

We request that this letter and its annex be circulated to all Member States as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda item 53.

(*Signed*) Gary **Quinlan**

(*Signed*) José Luis **Cancela**

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Annex to the letter dated 19 January 2011 from the Permanent Representatives of Australia and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the President of the General Assembly

Third workshop on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations, New York, 6 December 2010

1. The Permanent Missions of Australia and Uruguay to the United Nations co-hosted a third workshop on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations on 6 December 2010.

2. The aim of the workshop was to provide a forum for an exchange of views between Member States, peacekeepers from the field and the Secretariat on the strategic framework for mission strategies, which is currently under development, and the additional steps the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support are taking to improve the implementation of mandates to protect civilians in the field. The workshop built on two earlier workshops on the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping operations co-hosted by the Permanent Missions of Australia and Uruguay to the United Nations in January 2009 (see A/63/722) and January 2010 (see A/64/721), respectively.

Background

3. Drawing on the frank dialogue among Member States at the second workshop, in January 2010 (see A/64/721), the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations requested the Secretariat to develop a strategic framework containing elements and parameters for mission-specific strategies to guide senior mission leadership in elaborating a comprehensive protection strategy aligned with the mission's concept of operations (A/64/19, para. 149). This language demonstrated widespread support for peacekeeping missions with protection of civilians mandates to develop comprehensive strategies.

4. In parallel with the General Assembly, the Security Council welcomed the initiative to develop a strategic framework. In its open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict in November 2010, the Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement (S/PRST/2010/25) that welcomed the proposals, conclusions and recommendations on the protection of civilians in the 2010 report of the Special Committee (A/64/19), including the progress in elaborating a conceptual framework.

5. Against the backdrop of this normative progress, the workshop in December 2010 heard from peacekeepers in the field and the Secretariat. The workshop was divided into two sessions to facilitate discussion between the panellists, Member States, the Secretariat and non-governmental organizations. A list of the panellists is attached to the present document (see attachment). A summary of the key issues discussed in the sessions follows.

Session one
Perspectives from the field

6. The first session focused on the humanitarian and military perspectives of peacekeepers in the field from two peacekeeping missions with mandates to protect

civilians: the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The presentations of the panellists demonstrated that peacekeeping missions faced many of the same challenges in trying to implement mandates to protect civilians.

7. One of the challenges that peacekeeping missions were facing was addressing the protection challenges across a wide area, with limits on the resources available to do so. In many cases, peacekeeping missions had not deployed to mandated troop levels, and did not have the required enablers, such as helicopters. While this was an unfortunate reality and one that the United Nations continued to try to address with Member States, there was general agreement that the United Nations needed to do a better job of articulating what peacekeeping missions would be able to do with the resources they already had when it came to protecting civilians. Without a clear indication of the resources required to implement tasks relating to the protection of civilians, it was difficult for missions to manage expectations as to what could and could not be achieved by the peacekeeping mission. The ability of peacekeeping missions to respond to emerging crises that threatened civilians would also be enhanced by improved information-gathering processes and early warning systems.

8. Another area viewed as difficult was ensuring that the peacekeeping mission engaged all stakeholders, particularly the host Government and local populations, in their planning and strategies to implement mandates to protect civilians. Peacekeeping missions frequently had several different tasks within their mandates, which might include complex initiatives such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security sector reform. These tasks frequently required interaction with local security forces to effectively build up the ability of the host Government to protect civilians; however, this interaction also required careful scrutiny, as those same Government forces might have been guilty of harming civilians. Temporary fixes and creating dependencies were traps that needed to be avoided.

9. The panellists agreed that different actors needed to work effectively together and to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities on the ground. In some instances, where humanitarian actors were trying to deliver humanitarian assistance, this could be hampered by the absence of a military presence to provide a safe and secure environment. At the same time, the lack of a civilian presence in many deployed military and police peacekeeping units hampered efforts to engage with the local population. The lack of a female presence in some of these units made it particularly difficult to engage with women and children, who were often the most exposed and vulnerable. In isolated locations it was often hard to place a local woman within a unit and tell peacekeepers to trust her, despite this function being vital. Better education efforts were needed.

10. Although many welcomed the efforts under way to improve the ability of peacekeeping missions to protect civilians on the ground, there was agreement that it remained unfamiliar business for many troops. Training centres understood traditional peacekeeping training, but did not know how to teach protection of civilians, which was often about having a better understanding of the cultural environment that peacekeepers were deploying into. It was too late to tell peacekeepers on arrival in the mission how they should act: this needed to occur before arrival in the mission and it also needed to be mission specific. Training needed to keep pace with the times.

11. An early working draft of the strategic framework had been made available to peacekeeping missions in January 2010. The purpose of the strategy was to ensure that peacekeeping missions were working from the same page, and, according to the panellists from the field, it provided a good template to start with.

Session two
Strategic framework for comprehensive mission strategies

12. The second session provided a forum for discussion of the content of the draft strategic framework to guide mission leadership in the development of comprehensive mission strategies to implement mandates to protect civilians. Several of the challenges that had been identified in the first session were discussed in the context of how the strategic framework might be used to address those challenges.

13. It was made clear by the Secretariat that mission-wide strategies and a comprehensive United Nations approach was necessary to improve the ability of peacekeeping missions to protect civilians on the ground. The draft framework was being developed following a request from the Special Committee in its 2010 report (A/64/19). It was one of the first operational tools being developed for the protection of civilians and provided advice on key issues for consideration when missions were planning for the protection of civilians. The framework was a tool for missions to develop their own strategies and to ensure a more common approach to the protection of civilians in United Nations peacekeeping missions. This was particularly important to ensure there was no duplication by different actors and that there were clear and well-established priorities among mission leaderships. The framework was divided into three parts: part one articulated the purpose, scope and key considerations prior to drafting the strategy; part two provided an annotated template for comprehensive strategies to protect civilians; and part three included an annex with an implementation matrix and further references. Risk assessment was the focus of the strategy. Other key elements included analysis of early warning and crisis response, analysis of mission resources and capabilities, roles and responsibilities, coordination mechanisms, monitoring and reporting (including lessons learned) and expectation management.

14. How the strategy would give guidance on managing issues of consent was considered to be of significant importance. This issue was primarily viewed as one of managing the relationship between the host Government, local authorities and the peacekeeping mission. It was critical that peacekeeping missions understood that they had a responsibility to consult and to understand what other actors were doing. The framework would provide a guide of how to discuss issues with local authorities and how to ensure ongoing cooperation with the host authority. However, those details would need to be articulated by each mission, rather than a United Nations-wide approach. It was also suggested that consent was much broader and included management of the relationship between troop- and police-contributing countries participating in peacekeeping missions and the United Nations. Limited discussion of robust peacekeeping within the Special Committee and what the use of force to implement protection of civilians mandates required meant there was still a lack of clarity about what it meant to use force to implement a mandate to protect civilians.

15. Expectation management was viewed as another critical issue. Expectations needed to be managed for several different stakeholders: the local community where a peacekeeping mission was engaged; the host Government, which was relying on the peacekeeping mission to support its ability to protect its civilians; the international community, which had expectations of the United Nations; and the troop- and police-contributing countries, which had expectations about what they should be able to do. Those expectations needed to be clearly articulated and managed by both the Security Council, which needed to articulate its expectations of what the peacekeeping mission was intended to achieve, and the Secretariat. At the mission level, better risk assessments were also needed to identify the limitations of missions on the ground and risk mitigation strategies were required to manage them.

16. The framework was only one strand of work that the Secretariat was undertaking in response to the directions of the Special Committee. Work was also under way to develop training modules related to the protection of civilians, develop a resource and capabilities matrix, examine planning processes for the protection of civilians, and further capability development. There was broad agreement among participants that further efforts were required to improve the predeployment and in-mission training of peacekeepers on the protection of civilians, particularly for uniformed components. Although many peacekeepers understood the concept of the protection of civilians, they did not know how to achieve it. It was important for them to understand different scenarios they might face in the field and how to respond to them. This was something the Secretariat was working on. Ongoing evaluation of the training processes was also viewed as critical.

Conclusion

17. The strategic framework was viewed as an important step to ensure peacekeeping missions were planning for, considering and implementing mandates to protect civilians. There was broad agreement that the discussion on the protection of civilians had made considerable progress within the past two years: it was no longer about whether the protection of civilians should be a priority of peacekeeping missions, but how to implement it as a priority. The dialogue of all three workshops to date had assisted in the organic evolution of that discussion. It was clear from the discussions that the United Nations was moving in the right direction, but that significant challenges remained and Member States would need to remain engaged with the Secretariat as it took its work forward.

Attachment

Session one
Perspectives from the field

Chair:	Gary Quinlan, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Australia to the United Nations
Panellists:	Oriano Micaletti, Officer-in-Charge, Humanitarian Liaison Office, African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur
	Nick Peek, Chief Plans Officer, United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Session two
Strategic framework to guide the development of comprehensive strategies

Chair:	José Luis Cancela, Ambassador and Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Uruguay to the United Nations
Panellists:	Alain Le Roy, Under-Secretary-General, Department of Peacekeeping Operations
	Izumi Nakamitsu, Director, Policy, Evaluation and Training Division, Department of Peacekeeping Operations
	Hansjoerg Strohmeyer, Chief, Policy Development and Studies Branch, Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs